



The Existence of Bekayat Tradition in Sembung Village, Narmada Subdistrict, West Lombok

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ABSTRACT

Traditional arts often face challenges in evolving with the times. The processes of inheritance and preservation become common diction and challenges in maintaining the existence of traditional arts. This is one of the issues faced by the traditional art group Bekayat in Sembung Village, Narmada Subdistrict, West Lombok Regency. Observing such a reality of tradition, researching the existence of the Bekayat tradition becomes an interesting topic. The goal is to understand the reality of the Bekayat tradition through the analysis of its form, function, and inheritance process in maintaining its existence. A descriptive qualitative method is used to address the issues, with data collection techniques including observation, interviews, and documentation. To test the validity of the data, the researcher uses triangulation techniques. The results show that the existence of the Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village, Narmada Subdistrict, West Lombok Regency has weakened. Several factors contribute to the weakening existence of this tradition, namely: 1) Political factors. 2) Economic factors. 3) Regeneration factors.

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional arts are arts born within the community due to emotional impulses based on a life perspective that is repeatedly practiced across generations. The concept of art that develops within the community is related to entertainment, communication, expression, skills, beauty, and neatness. Traditional Indonesian art, especially in Lombok, has a strong collective spirit, making its characteristic traits, such as friendliness and politeness, well-known. Many traditional arts in Lombok are still preserved to this day. The island, which boasts various cultures, maintains these traditions that are inseparable from daily life, indicating the strong presence of traditions on the island.

Some of the traditional arts in the Lombok community that are still preserved and exist today include the Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village, Narmada Subdistrict, West Lombok Regency. Sembung Village is one of the 21 villages in Narmada Subdistrict, West Lombok Regency. It is an original village formed around 1888 (Sembung Village Profile). In the past, the Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village was active and well-known, but over time, the spirit of the Bekayat traditional art has waned. The Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village, Narmada Subdistrict, West Lombok Regency, is now rarely practiced and even unheard of. Over the past few decades, the development of Bekayat has experienced a decline, with only five practitioners left in Sembung Village.

The Bekayat tradition is a literary tradition in the Lombok community, involving the recitation of hikayat/poetry in a singing manner. The Bekayat recitation is conducted by two or more people, who act as readers, nyaruf (those who respond to the book's recitation), and the book's translator, known as pujangga, typically performed in open spaces. This literary appreciation tradition has a long literary history. The Bekayat tradition was used as a medium for Islamic preaching and si'ar by religious figures at that time. The Bekayat tradition is closely

associated with Islamic nuances due to its historical origins, which cannot be separated from the introduction of Islam from the Middle East. Data shows that the Bekayat tradition began in the 16th century (Made Suyasa, 2022).

The high appreciation of the Sasak community for Malay (Islamic) literary works is evident. Besides being used as a medium for preaching, the Bekayat tradition is also employed in religious ceremonies such as Isra' Mi'raj, ngurisan (baby's hair cutting), nyunatan (circumcision), and for traditional needs such as wedding ceremonies, Maulid Nabi, nyiwak (nine days after death commemoration), and other ceremonial or traditional activities. The manuscripts read in the Bekayat tradition are written in Arabic Malay and jejawen (Sasak script). The reading of the manuscripts is adjusted to the event and the request of the event organizers.

The presence of the Bekayat tradition, which has seamlessly integrated with the religious ritual life of the Sasak community, has fostered social bonds through art, allowing the Bekayat tradition to be accepted by the Sasak people. The Bekayat tradition has become an inseparable part of various religious rituals and is believed to bring blessings, safety, and even be considered a remedy. However, over time, with the development of communication technology and economic globalization, this Bekayat tradition has gradually begun to decline.

The development of communication technology and economic globalization fundamentally brings consequences to the values and lifestyles of a community. Borrowing the term from Smith (2001), current social development has essentially surpassed modernity (marked by the emergence of the goods and services industry) towards postmodernity, which tends to be more organized around the development of information technology, cultural consumption, and mass media entertainment. The wave of modernization in technology has shifted several traditions that were previously complements to rituals and also served as entertainment media. Nowadays, community entertainment has been largely replaced by various forms, both modern and traditional, available in recordings on social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and others. The impact of economic globalization also extends to many aspects of community life, including the existence of traditional arts, which have long been considered cultural identity for their supporters (Irianto et al., 2015; Pereira, 2017).

Apart from the tide of modernization, appreciation, and conflicts within the community are also contributing factors, such as the conflicts within the Bekayat community in Sembung Village. The Bekayat tradition, which we used to hear with melodious tunes from historical hikayat (stories) and the values contained within the hikayat lyrics, is now rarely found or even unheard of. The position of the Bekayat tradition is gradually fading from the cultural stage. Considering the importance of traditional arts in community life, issues related to traditional arts within the community will not be separated from our collective responsibility as the nation's successors.

This phenomenon has impacted the development of the Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village, Narmada Subdistrict, West Lombok Regency, where the community members who practice and enjoy the Bekayat tradition are decreasing day by day. Currently, only a small portion of the community, consisting mainly of religious and community leaders, are interested in the Bekayat tradition. The Bekayat tradition is gradually being abandoned, developing only within certain community groups and during specific performances. This situation is certainly concerning; thus, it is necessary to investigate the existence and the community's attitude towards the Bekayat tradition in the Sasak community of Lombok, particularly in Sembung Village, Narmada Subdistrict, West Lombok Regency. This will help preserve and pass down the tradition to future generations, ensuring it continues and thrives from generation to generation.

Based on this perspective, the research is limited to examining the existence of the Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village, Narmada Subdistrict, West Lombok Regency. The aim of this study is to explain and describe the existence of the Bekayat tradition in the context of the current Sasak community. Several similar studies have been conducted, discussing human experiences related to orality and literacy (Made Suyasa, 2022). This study differs as it attempts to address the issue of the existence of traditional arts amidst modernization. Other studies discuss traditional material in the context of oral traditions, which is different from the

Bekayat tradition (Sylvie Meiliana, 2020; Bayu Ananto Wibowo, 2022; Suyasa, 2022; Rohana, 2022).

METHOD

The research method used in this study is the qualitative research method. Qualitative methods are research methods that produce findings or information that cannot be achieved with measurement or statistical procedures. Qualitative research is "Research to obtain data in the form of written or spoken descriptions from observed subjects" (J Maxwell, 1998). In this research, the researcher examines descriptive data presented in the form of explanations and reports. The qualitative method is used to find information related to the existence of the Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village, Narmada Subdistrict, West Lombok Regency.

This research uses a functional theory approach that emphasizes stability and social balance, while conflict theory emphasizes competition and tension between groups and the community. This is done to view the Bekayat phenomenon holistically, interpreting the same events in different contexts to reveal different types of facts (Singai, 2008). The research data were collected using three techniques: interviews, observation, and documentation. In this study, the researcher used source triangulation to obtain data from various sources by checking the data with the same sources and techniques but at different times. Checking data through various sources, times, and techniques enhances the methodological, theoretical, and interpretative strength of qualitative research (Arnild Augina Mekarisce, 2020). Data analysis was conducted using data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and data verification techniques.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The existence of Indonesian culture is a national cultural wealth derived from the diversity of ethnic groups and regions, each with its own historical and cultural traditions. The presence of culture in each ethnic group serves as an identity symbol, indicating where a person comes from. Each culture holds local wisdom, and these values of local wisdom vary from one ethnic group to another. Every culture experiences development and growth over time, but some still maintain their traditions and remain isolated from external influences. Such is the case with the Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village, Narmada Subdistrict, West Lombok Regency.

This tradition has evolved since the 16th century and was used as a medium for Islamic preaching and *si'ar* by religious figures at that time (Made Suyasa, 2022). The Bekayat tradition is closely associated with Islamic nuances due to its historical origins, which cannot be separated from the introduction of Islam from the Middle East. Bekayat was used as one of the Islamic preaching media for the pre-Islamic Sasak population in the past. The high appreciation of the Sasak community for Malay (Islamic) literary works is evident. This literary appreciation tradition has a long literary history. Data shows that the Bekayat tradition began in the 16th century (Made Suyasa, 2012).

The Bekayat tradition is used as a medium for preaching and religious ceremonies. Additionally, the Bekayat tradition is used for customary needs such as wedding ceremonies, Maulid Nabi (Prophet Muhammad's birthday), *nyiwak* (nine days after death commemoration), *ngurisan* (baby's hair cutting), *nyunatan* (circumcision), and other ceremonies or traditions. The manuscripts read in the Bekayat tradition are written in Arabic Malay and *jejawen* (Sasak script). The reading of the manuscripts is adjusted to the event and the request of the event organizers.

Inheritance in the bekayat tradition

The Bekayat tradition is estimated to have begun developing during the second wave of Islamic dissemination brought by preachers from the Malay Peninsula through Goa. The Bekayat tradition was used as a medium for spreading Islam. Additionally, Bekayat served as part of the religious rituals of the Sasak community, fostering social bonds through art. It is believed that each recitation of hikayat in the Bekayat tradition brings blessings, safety, and even acts as a remedy for those who perform and listen to it (Made Suyasa, 2012).

In the Sasak language, "Bekayat" comes from "Ngayatan," which means to frighten slightly to teach someone using a book or poetry composed by earlier scholars, performed by three or more people who sing the recitations. Another understanding explains that Bekayat comes from the word "Hikayat," meaning story. These stories are about the companions of the Prophet and pious people, intended to provide lessons for the community. Besides being used as a medium for preaching, the Bekayat tradition is also employed in religious ceremonies such as *ngurisan* (baby's hair cutting), *nyunatan* (circumcision), and other customary needs like wedding ceremonies, Maulid Nabi (Prophet Muhammad's birthday), *Isra' Mi'raj*, *nyiwak* (nine days after death commemoration), and other traditional ceremonies.

During the Maulid Nabi event in Sembung Village, they usually use the *Kitab Zahru Basyim*, which contains the life journey of the Prophet from birth to death. They also use the *Kitab Nur Muhammad*, which explains Nur Muhammad (the light of Muhammad) as the first created being by Allah and the source of all creation, including the entire universe. Nur Muhammad refers to the Prophet Muhammad, who was already a prophet before the creation of Adam. This means that the essence (Nur) of Muhammad is the beginning of creation, while his physical form as Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the final and complete prophet of Islam.

For the *Isra' Mi'raj* commemoration, Bekayat in Sembung Village typically uses *Kifayatul Muhtaj*, detailing the Prophet's journey from the Sacred Mosque to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and to Sidratul Muntaha. In wedding ceremonies, Bekayat usually employs the *Kitab Qomaruzzaman*, which narrates the love story between a prince named Qomaruzzaman and a princess named Budur. They also use *Kitab Intan Berlin*, which contains the rights of a husband and wife. For seven-month pregnancy ceremonies, Bekayat typically uses *Kitab Zahrul Basyim*, taken from the chapter about the Prophet's time in the womb until his birth.

Inheritance refers to the passing down of something from one generation to the next. The transfer of culture from one generation to the next is also known as transmission. Transmission (generation transfer) is a natural process occurring in various groups, including performing arts groups (Elvandari, E. 2020). The strategy for inheriting the Bekayat tradition involves transferring the values and norms of the Bekayat tradition through learning from the older generation to the next.

The inheritance of traditional Bekayat art to the younger generation is considered important by the community for several reasons. The importance of preserving and passing down the Bekayat tradition is based on the *fiqh* principle that says, "preserve traditions that are still relevant for us to maintain, so we keep the good traditions from the past," like the Bekayat preaching tradition. Preaching through hikayat poetry is a cultural tradition and an identity of the Sasak community. The Bekayat tradition serves

as a form of religious study in art, where religious study is not only conducted through mosques or prayer rooms but also through traditional arts like Bekayat. The process of inheriting the Bekayat tradition is also intended to create regeneration from the previous generation to the current young generation, related to the structure of religious organizations.

The process of inheriting the Bekayat tradition is done through learning, understanding the values, reading the used books or poetry, interpreting them, and mastering the singing skills involved, all through a learning process. Each traditional art has its own inheritance system, which influences the existence of that art. Generally, there are three inheritance systems: "Vertical Transmission," "Horizontal Transmission," and "Diagonal Transmission."

Vertical Transmission is an inheritance system that occurs through genetic mechanisms passed down over time across generations, involving the transfer of cultural traits from parents to children. In vertical inheritance, parents pass down values, skills, beliefs, and more to their children. Therefore, vertical inheritance is also called "biological transmission," a biological inheritance system (Sugita, 2021). Horizontal transmission occurs when someone learns from the behaviors of their peers, possibly from playmates who share the same tradition and are considered peers (Nurasih, 2013). Diagonal Transmission emphasizes learning within educational institutions (both formal, informal, and non-formal education). Inheritance within formal institutions (schools) starts from early childhood education, kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, high school/vocational school, and higher education (Elvandari, E. 2020). So far, the inheritance process has been mostly vertical, from parents to their descendants. However, horizontal processes are also possible.

The existence of the bekayat tradition in the modern era

It is undeniable that the Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village today appears quite concerning. Not only is there an issue of inheritance, but its presence in this modern era is feared to decline and disappear from the community's social space. Various factors influence the growth of this tradition, including political, economic, and regeneration factors.

The proponents of the Bekayat tradition began to emerge when Bukhari served as the village head in 2009, with a mission to establish LPTQ (Institute for the Development of Qur'anic Recitation). From this institution, the idea of preserving the Bekayat tradition arose. Initially, the Bekayat tradition was well-received by the community, with many invitations, even from outside the village. One informant in an interview said, "The Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village began around 2009. The Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village is part of the LPTQ program, and that year the LPTQ was established. From the LPTQ, ideas for developing Islamic arts emerged, not only Bekayat but also Kasidah. Due to this event, a Bekayat group consisting of five people, including Bukhari as the Village Head, was formed. Bekayat was active, but when Bukhari's term ended, the existence of the Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village began to weaken.

Besides political factors, economic factors also contribute to the weakening of the Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village. Initially, the Bekayat tradition thrived with funding from Bukhari as the village head of Sembung. At that time, the community did

not need to spend any money to present Bekayat. If the community wanted to provide compensation, no specific rate was applied. The community was allowed to pay voluntarily, and because of Bukhari's support, the Bekayat group never worried about earning income from performing the tradition. However, over time, the Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village began to weaken along with the declining economic condition of the main supporter of the group.

The regeneration factor also contributes to the weakening of the Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village. In this digital era, it is indeed challenging to pass on traditional arts, such as the Bekayat tradition, where a Bekayat performer must be truly sincere in preserving the Bekayat tradition because it serves as a medium for preaching or religious study in the form of art. Bekayat performers in Sembung Village have not fully ensured the inheritance of the Bekayat tradition. The research results indicate that the inheritance of the Bekayat tradition through the recitation of hikayat is waiting for someone willing to learn and engage in the Bekayat tradition. The lack of interest among the younger generation in this tradition is a primary factor in the weak regeneration process. The stigmatization of traditions as outdated and unable to represent themselves as modern individuals, for example, is a common reason found in the declining inheritance of traditions.

The Bekayat Tradition in Sembung Village is currently seen as quite concerning. Several factors contributing to this include the halt in activities due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus. On the other hand, the stigma of the tradition often being considered outdated has led to a lack of interest in continuing this tradition. Over time, the existence of the Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village has begun to weaken. Political factors have also contributed to the decline of this tradition. The influence of political factors on Bekayat's existence is evident from the aspect of the formation of the Bekayat group, partly due to the desire of an influential community member (as the village head). The cessation of the key figure (Bukhari) from the village head position has further eroded the existence of Bekayat. Despite its decline, Bekayat refrains from self-promotion because the concept of this traditional art is preaching.

CONCLUSION

The reality of the Bekayat tradition is inseparable from the journey of its purpose. This tradition does not only exist in the Sembung Village community but can also be found in other villages around Lombok Island. This research is focused on specifically understanding the Bekayat phenomenon in Sembung Village as a means of enriching the discourse on tradition inheritance. As with Bekayat in the life of the Sembung Village community, its existence is influenced by political factors. Although many factors have influenced its journey, political factors are broadly the main aspects impacting its existence. Currently, the Bekayat tradition in Sembung Village is quite concerning, far from evolving in a positive connotation. More precisely, this tradition is declining and may be displaced from the life of the Sembung Village community.

The purpose of forming this tradition is fundamentally influenced by the desire of someone with power (politics). It grew and existed in line with the existence of its initiator. The initiator in this case was Bukhari, who served as the village head of Sembung, Narmada Subdistrict, West Lombok Regency. In the research, Bukhari also served as a financial supporter in the development of Bekayat, allowing the tradition to live and thrive. It dimmed along with the economic decline of Bukhari. This power and economic ability are the main and crucial factors

ensuring Bekayat's existence. Although other factors have emerged, impacting Bekayat's existence as part of the influencing social dynamics.

The environmental condition during the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the factors contributing to the further decline of Bekayat. The community's decline in various aspects such as economy, education, and health during the pandemic made them somewhat neglectful of the Bekayat tradition. The prolonged duration of the pandemic weakened the participants' spirit to revive Bekayat, aside from the two main factors mentioned earlier. The existence of Bekayat faces challenges in the future. In the context of the inheritance process, regeneration is also a factor that dampens Bekayat's life. The stigmatization of traditions commonly understood by the younger generation means the regeneration process does not proceed due to the lack of public interest in this tradition.

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